

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS COLOMBO 001703

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SA/INS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: KARUNA FACTION FORMS PAPER TIGER PARTY

REF: COLOMBO 1588

1. (U) On October 12 the Tamil vernacular media received a press release announcing the formation of a new political party by Karuna, the former Eastern military commander for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who split with LTTE headquarters in March. (Note: Karuna fled the East after the break and is widely believed to be living in another Asian country. Since the split, LTTE headquarters in the north, in an effort to reassert its control, has killed a number of Karuna cadres, including his brother.) According to the press release, the new party, named the People's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, is dedicated to the restoration of the rights of the Tamil people, who have been "misguided by the terrorist Prabhakaran. . . .We started our struggle against the government . . . but today we have to fight to be liberated from Prabhakaran." The announcement, signed by "Secretary Gnanarajah," offers a website and an e-mail address (www.tmvp.org and contact@tmvp.org, respectively) but, not surprisingly, no telephone number. Also not surprising is the fact that the Batticaloa street address listed for the "office" provides only a road name (Lake Road, a big main thoroughfare in Batticaloa) with no identifying house number. Like its name, the party's logo depicted on the website looks suspiciously similar to the LTTE logo, with just a few variations in color and detail.

2. (SBU) Sources in Batticaloa, whose residents live in fear of the continued factional fighting and periodic LTTE reprisals against suspected Karuna sympathizers, reported no public reaction (other than skepticism) to the announcement of the new "party." One contact attributed the apparent lack of interest to fear of being identified as a member of the new rival movement. Even people who know each other well, he said, are circumspect in their comments.

3. (SBU) Comment: The new party's similarity in name and logo to the LTTE is an obvious and intended affront to the Tiger leadership in the north. Despite its identification with Karuna, we believe the real father of this party is Douglas Devananda, head of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) and former anti-LTTE paramilitary-turned-Cabinet Minister. Following Karuna's split last March, Devananda infuriated the LTTE leadership by publicly offering to set Karuna up in politics. In September Devananda claimed to poloff that he was in constant contact with Karuna and was prepared to help him launch his party at the propitious moment. (Note: The EPDP Spokesman disavowed any knowledge of the press release when we contacted him October 12.) Why now is the propitious moment is unclear, but the recent murder by the LTTE of Karuna's deputy and brother (Reftel), coupled with the absence right now of much of the LTTE leadership on a highly publicized visit to Europe, could be factors. That said, with Karuna out of the country and his followers either dead or on an LTTE hit list, we do not expect this party to register with the Election Commission or conduct a successful membership drive anytime soon. For right now, we expect Karuna's People's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to remain very much a paper tiger.

LUNSTEAD